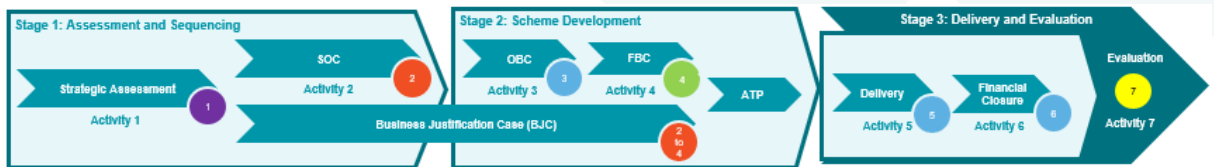




|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| <b>Report to:</b> | Combined Authority   |
| <b>Date:</b>      | 14 March 2024  |
| <b>Subject:</b>   | <b>Local Nature Recovery Strategy Project Approvals - Investment Priority 3 – Creating Great Places and Accelerated Infrastructure</b> |
| <b>Director:</b>  | Liz Hunter, Director of Policing, Environment & Place  |
| <b>Author:</b>    | Craig Taylor, Head of Strategic Portfolio Office   |

## 1 Purpose of this Report

- 1.1 To report on proposals for the progression of, and funding for projects under Investment Priority 3 – Creating Great Places and Accelerated Infrastructure, within the West Yorkshire Investment Strategy (WYIS), that have been considered at stages 1, 2 and 3 of the Combined Authority’s assurance process.



- 1.2 The recommendations can be found in Section 12 of this report.

## 2 Report

- 2.1 This report presents proposals for the progression of schemes through the Combined Authority’s assurance process in line with the Combined Authority’s Assurance Framework. Further details on the schemes summarised below can be found as part of this report.

## 3 Investment Priority 3 (IP3) - Creating Great Places and Accelerated Infrastructure

### Background

- 3.1 The 2021 Environment Bill enacted a commitment to a [Nature Recovery Network](#) made in the government’s 2018 [25-year Environment Plan](#) to restore and enhance nature across England.
- 3.2 Key to the Nature Recovery Network is a system of 48 mandatory Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRs) – spatial planning tools for nature. These are statutory levers that, together, will help to agree priorities, identify high-impact opportunities and propose measures to restore habitats and underpin wider nature recovery on the ground to deliver biodiversity and wider benefits.

## Policy Context

- 3.3 The LNRS supports delivery of Mission 4 'A sustainable West Yorkshire – making lives greener' of the West Yorkshire Plan. The LNRS also complements the [WY Plan and Climate and Environment Plan](#), and specifically the priorities Natural Environment NE01 and Climate Ready Strategy CR01.
- 3.4 The LNRS will align with several of the Mayoral's priorities and pledges, with a primary focus on the following three:
- Tackle the Climate Emergency and Protect our Environment
  - Build 5,000 Sustainable Homes
  - Support Local Businesses and Be a Champion for Our Regional Economy
- 3.5 LNRS will propose measures for habitat restoration and build on the aspirations of the Combined Authority's Blue Green Infrastructure Strategy (which includes measures such as new woodland areas and peat restoration among its delivery aims) and the West Yorkshire Low Emission Strategy (WYLES), which includes priorities relating to air quality.
- 3.6 Other strategies and priorities relevant to this project include the White Rose Forest Programme and emerging White Rose Forest Plan, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust *State of Nature* (to be published early 2024), Biodiversity Net Gain, district local plans, Natural England's Nature Recovery Projects, including plans to establish a new National Nature Reserve in Bradford district.

## The West Yorkshire LNRS

- 3.7 The Secretary of State for Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has appointed 'Responsible Authorities' to lead the preparation of the strategy for each area. The Combined Authority is the Responsible Authority for the first West Yorkshire LNRS.

## Scheme Summaries

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>Local Nature Recovery Strategy</b><br/>West Yorkshire</p> | <p><b><u>Scheme description</u></b></p> <p>The 2021 Environment Act mandated 48 spatial Local Nature Recovery Strategies.</p> <p>The CA is the responsible authority for the first Local Nature Recovery Strategy for West Yorkshire. This will identify opportunities for nature's recovery, specifically for boosting biodiversity and, where appropriate, wider environmental benefits (e.g. flood mitigation) and co-benefits (e.g. health). Local Nature Recovery Strategies will be re-published every 3-10 years.</p> <p>The scheme will develop the West Yorkshire Nature Recovery Strategy, comprising a statement of Biodiversity Priorities and a Habitat Map by mid-2025 to enable better understanding of the data to support species and habitat workstreams.</p> <p>The scheme is funded by the Combined Authority Shared Consultancy Budget, the Local Nature Recovery Strategy Seed Funding, and the Biodiversity Net Gain Grants.</p> <p><b><u>Impact</u></b></p> <p>The development of the LNRS will result in the production of a statement of biodiversity priorities and a habitat map, which will provide a better understanding of how to support local species and habitats. A public-facing website will enable information to be shared and there will be an increased awareness and understanding of the LNRS.</p> <p>Due to the nature of the scheme, a benefit cost ratio has not been calculated. Value for money is established through the wider benefits the LNRS unlocks and through associated health benefits.</p> <p><b><u>Decision sought</u></b></p> <p>Approval to proceed through decision points 2 to 4 (business justification case) and work commences on activity 5 (delivery).</p> <p>Total value of the scheme - £459,376</p> <p>Total value of Combined Authority funding - £459,376</p> <p>Funding recommendation sought - £459,376</p> <p>A decision by the Combined Authority is sought as part of this report</p> |
|---|--|

## 4 Information

4.1 The Combined Authority's assurance framework requires that formal approval is given to the following elements of a scheme as part of its development:

- The progression of a scheme through a decision point to the next activity.
- Indicative or full approval to the total value of the scheme funding requested.
- The Combined Authority's entry into a funding agreement with the scheme's promoter.
- The assurance pathway and approval route for future decision points.
- The scheme's approval tolerances.

4.2 This report provides information required to enable the Combined Authority to approve each of the above elements.

### Projects in Stage 1: Assessment and Sequencing

4.3 There are no schemes to review at this stage.

### Projects in Stage 2: Scheme development

|                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| <b>Project Title</b>  | <b>Local Nature Recovery Strategy</b>                     |
| <b>Stage</b>          | 1 (assessment and sequencing) and 2 (project development) |
| <b>Decision Point</b> | 2 to 4 (business justification)                           |

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| Is this a key decision?   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?                                       | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No            |
| Does the report contain confidential or exempt information or appendices?               | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| If relevant, state paragraph number of Schedule 12A, Local Government Act 1972, Part 1: |   |  |
| Are there implications for equality and diversity?                                      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No            |

### Background

4.4 The Environment Act 2021 requires that each responsible authority publishes their Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). The Combined Authority is the responsible authority for the first LNRS for West Yorkshire. This will identify opportunities for nature recovery, specifically for boosting biodiversity and wider environmental benefits such as flood prevention.

4.5 The West Yorkshire LNRS is a tool that will integrate regulatory compliance, strategic planning, engagement, evidence, and collaboration. It will commit to a sustainable future through a dynamic, adaptable approach that will help to agree priorities, identify high-impact opportunities to restore habitats and support wider nature recovery. The Strategy will focus on proposing measures that boost biodiversity, deliver wider environmental benefits and other associated benefits such as health benefits, where possible.

4.6 The key activities included in the production of the Strategy include:

- Mapping existing areas that are already legally protected, for example local nature reserves and local wildlife sites, and to map areas that could become of particular importance to support nature recovery.
- Collaborate with the local partner councils in West Yorkshire, the Peak District National Park and Natural England, as designated 'Supporting Authorities' in the LNRS process, and with other neighbouring responsible authorities to integrate the data that is held, which could include information on identified sites, species, habitats, topology, geology, and river systems.
- Engage and consult key stakeholder groups such as landowners, young people, communities of interest for example local businesses, 'green' groups and the public, to inform the strategy using local knowledge and identifying local priorities.
- Agreeing priorities for nature recovery with key stakeholders describing the area, identifying opportunities, and suggesting potential measures.
- Outlining a process for reviewing the impact in future Local Nature Recovery Strategies to record the longer-term effects of practical habitat creation and restoration.

4.7 The scheme objectives are:

- To develop and publish the West Yorkshire LNRS by mid-2025.
- To agree the format of the West Yorkshire LNRS governance structure to support the development and publication of the LNRS and have key parts of this in place by end of 2023.
- To identify, procure and use data to support decisions and provide evidence-base for proposed measures by the end of 2024.
- For a wide range of stakeholders to shape the LNRS at all stages by mid-2025.
- Raise awareness of the LNRS and opportunities to get involved by mid-2025.

4.8 A summary of the scheme's business case is included in **Appendix 1**.

### **Outputs and Outcomes**

4.9 The scheme outputs include:

- Development of the West Yorkshire LNRS, comprising a statement of biodiversity priorities and a habitat map by mid-2025.
- The creation of a steering group and sub-groups along with a professional board to develop a network of expertise.
- To develop a public-facing website to enable sharing of information.

4.10 The scheme outcomes include:

- The ability to support species and habitats through the gathering and understanding of data.
- Increased awareness and understanding of the LNRS.

4.11 Due to the nature of the scheme, a benefit cost ratio has not been calculated. Value for money is established through the wider benefits the creation of the LNRS produces.

### **Tackling the Climate Emergency Implications**

4.12 The scheme aims to support priorities relating to the climate and ecological emergency through promoting nature recovery, habitat creation and improving carbon sequestration which is the natural process where carbon is removed from the atmosphere through trees. In addition, the scheme promotes local access to nature which could reduce reliance on motorised travel thereby reducing carbon emissions.

4.13 The scheme prioritises the recovery and enhancement of nature and green spaces by emphasising the need to protect and enhance areas of significance for biodiversity.

4.14 The scheme recognises the role of infrastructure in achieving environmental goals and is likely to recognise the potential for infrastructure such as canal footpaths, and cycle paths to support connectivity between habitats and improve local access to nature.

### **Inclusive Growth Implications**

4.15 The scheme inclusive growth implications include:

- The scheme contributes to the inclusive growth agenda through the promotion of a sustainable environment that benefits all communities. Measures to enhance the natural environment, improve green spaces and improve health will benefit those communities that often face challenges with limited green space, and reduced access to nature.
- The strategy looks to enhance local green spaces which helps address health inequalities by promoting active lifestyles and reducing pollution. This particularly benefits groups with poor health.
- The strategy advocates for improved accessibility to green spaces and nature reserves by ensuring equitable access and promotes social equity and inclusion.

## **Equality and Diversity Implications**

- 4.16 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been undertaken for the scheme and equality and diversity impacts taken account of as part of the development of the scheme and the business case development.
- 4.17 The LNRS will unlock opportunities for more equal access to quality green spaces which will allow the communities which were previously disconnected from nature due to factors such as income, mobility and transport inequality, to experience the benefits of natural environments.
- 4.18 The scheme recognises that green spaces and natural environments can have a positive impact on people's well-being and can enhance relationships between communities and the natural environment. The scheme will support these factors by suggesting measures to help communities to experience a sense of attachment to nature which will foster positive environmental behaviour.
- 4.19 The scheme promotes inclusivity by prioritising areas that need ecological restoration, ensuring that more people can access and enjoy natural spaces by identifying barriers. It will propose measures to make natural environments more accessible to a wider range of people.

## **Consultation and Engagement**

- 4.20 An inclusive and comprehensive approach to consultation and engagement will be adopted, ensuring representation from diverse stakeholders, including local communities, environmental groups, and business interests. This includes a bi-monthly bulletin, online website and targeted engagement for farmers and landowners, facilitating valuable input and feedback. Statutory consultation is planned for the draft LNRS towards the end of the schemes development.

## **Risks**

- 4.21 The scheme risks and mitigations include:
- The risk of a lack of stakeholder engagement caused by inadequate outreach or consultee fatigue which could result in reduced project support or a lack of diverse input. This is mitigated by ensuring there is sufficient stakeholder mapping and ongoing engagement with a variety of channels.
  - The risk of insufficient funding caused by budget constraints and economic fluctuations could result in delays or reduced project scope. This is mitigated by regular and early budget review against expenditure to identify potential shortfalls and accurate financial monitoring and reporting, and a robust budget contingency.
  - The risk of policy and guidance changes revising the scope and project parameters and could result in budget overruns, delayed timelines, and retrospective changes to the LNRS process. This is mitigated through a proactive change management process to swiftly address policy alterations or delays in guidance and through maintaining close

communication with Natural England and other stakeholders to anticipate and remain agile to any changes.

- The risk of conflicting priorities between key stakeholders which could result in unclear responsibilities, failure to agree the project priorities and cause delays. This is mitigated by enhancing the governance framework to clearly define roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes among the project team and stakeholders, and through the implementation of regular reviews and communication channels.

## Costs

4.22 The total scheme costs are £459,376.

4.23 The Combined Authority's contribution is £459,376 which is comprised of:

- £50,000 from the Combined Authority Shared Consultancy Budget.
- £345,715 from the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs.
- £63,661 from Biodiversity Net Gain Grants.

## Future Assurance Pathway and Approval Route

| Assurance pathway               | Approval route  | Forecast approval date |
|---------------------------------|---|------------------------|
| Approval to Proceed             | Recommendation: Combined Authority's Portfolio Investment Panel<br>Decision: Combined Authority's Director of Policing, Environment & Place | 30/03/2024             |
| 5 (completion/service delivery) | Recommendation: Combined Authority's Portfolio Investment Panel<br>Decision: Combined Authority's Director of Policing, Environment & Place | 31/08/2025             |

## Other Key Timescales

- Start of delivery 29/03/2024
- Completion date 31/08/2025

## Assurance Tolerances

4.24 This approval is the first decision point for the scheme at committee. The assurance tolerances for the recommended approval in this report are:

| Assurance tolerances   |
|--|
| Combined Authority funding remain within +25% of those outlined in this report, to allow for the potential for additional funding which may be allocated from government.<br>Completion/service delivery date remains within +6 months of those outlined in this report. |



## **Appraisal Summary**

- 4.25 The scheme demonstrates clear alignment with local, regional, and national policies and priorities, as well as alignment to Mayoral pledges, Combined Authority priorities and wider local and national government priorities.
- 4.26 There is a clear alignment with the inclusive growth agenda by promoting a sustainable environment that benefits all communities, particularly those in areas that have historically faced deprivation and inequalities.
- 4.27 The scheme will have a significant positive impact on the environment and on general wellbeing of the communities in West Yorkshire.

## **Recommendations**

- 4.28 The Combined Authority, subject to the conditions set by the Portfolio Investment Panel, approves that:
  - (i) The Local Nature Recovery Strategy scheme proceeds through decision points 2 to 4 (business justification case) and work commences on activity 5 (delivery).
  - (ii) Approval to the Combined Authority's contribution of £459,376 is given. The total scheme value is £459,376.
  - (iii) Future approvals are made in accordance with the assurance pathway and approval route outlined in this report. Where required, any future committee level approvals are delegated to the Place, Regeneration and Housing Committee.

## **Projects in Stage 3: Delivery and Evaluation**

- 4.29 There are no schemes to review at this stage.

## **5 Tackling the Climate Emergency implications**

- 5.1 The Climate Emergency implications have been considered on all projects included in this report as part of their business case development.

## **6 Inclusive Growth implications**

- 6.1 The inclusive growth implications have been considered on all projects included in this report as part of their business case development.

## **7 Equality and Diversity implications**

- 7.1 Equality Impact Assessments (EqIA) have been undertaken on all projects included in this report as part of their business case development.

## **8 Financial implications**

- 8.1 The report seeks endorsement to expenditure from the available Combined Authority funding as set out in this report.

## **9 Legal implications**

- 9.1 The payment of funding to any recipient will be subject to a funding agreement being in place between the Combined Authority and the organisation in question.
- 9.2 In accordance with the voting arrangements of the Combined Authority, all Combined Authority members may vote on this item with the exception of the Non-Constituent Council Combined Authority Member.

## **10 Staffing implications**

- 10.1 A combination of Combined Authority and local partner council project resources are or are in the process of being identified and costed for within the schemes in this report.

## **11 External consultees**

- 11.1 Where applicable scheme promoters have been consulted on the content of this report.

## **12 Recommendations (Summary)**

### **Local Nature Recovery Strategy**

- 12.1 The Combined Authority, subject to the conditions set by the Portfolio Investment Panel, approves that:
- (i) The Local Nature Recovery Strategy scheme proceeds through decision points 2 to 4 (business justification case) and work commences on activity 5 (delivery).
  - (ii) Approval to the Combined Authority's contribution of £459,376 is given. The total scheme value is £459,376.
  - (iii) Future approvals are made in accordance with the assurance pathway and approval route outlined in this report. Where required, any future committee level approvals are delegated to the Place, Regeneration and Housing Committee.

## **13 Background Documents**

- 13.1 None as part of this report.

## **14 Appendices**

[Appendix 1 – Local Nature Recovery Strategy – Business Case Summary](#)